

In the Claims

1. (original) Dried food product, wherein said food product, in a first treatment step, is at least one of cleaned, peeled, seeded, shredded, and chopped into pieces;
in a second treatment step, is frozen;
in a third treatment step, is simultaneously thawed and predried with at least one of hot conditioned air, and a solution having an osmotic pressure higher than water in which the frozen food product is dipped, wherein the solution is kept at a temperature high enough to thaw the frozen products;
in a fourth treatment step, is dried with hot air;
in a fifth treatment step, is subjected to a heat treatment in a vacuum by means of microwave treatment so that a cellular break-up and puffing up of said food occurs for obtaining well hydratable food being finally dried and having an instant character;
in a sixth treatment step, is at least one of broken, sieved, selected, and packed.
2. (original) Dried food as set forth in claim 1, wherein said heat treatment is performed at a reduced atmospheric pressure, preferably in the range 10-100 mbar.
3. (original) Dried food as set forth in claim 1, wherein said food product is milled into food-powder or granulated.
4. (original) Dried food as set forth in claim 1, wherein said food product is at least one of bananas, pineapples, mangos, papayas, melons, cherries, or berries, and strawberries.
5. (original) The dried fruit of claim 1 wherein said food product in its frozen state after the second treatment step is at least one of stored and transported prior to thawing and further treatment.

6. (original) The dried food of claim 1 wherein said food product is coated with a separating agent prior to or after being frozen in the second step.

7. (original) The dried food of claim 1 wherein said food product is dipped into a solution having an osmotic pressure higher than water prior to being frozen in the second treatment step or while being predried with hot conditioned air in the third treatment step.

8. (original) The dried food of claim 7 wherein said solution comprises at least one of sugar, salt, coating agents, separating agents, flavor additives, aroma, and food colorants.

9. (currently amended) A method to produce a food product that is dried, the method comprising the steps of:

preparing said food product for drying;

freezing said food product;

thawing and predrying with at least one of a solution kept at a temperature high enough to thaw the frozen products and having an osmotic pressure higher than water in which the frozen food product is dipped, and hot conditioned air;

drying said food product with hot air; and

heat treating by microwave treatment in a vacuum said food product so that a cellular break-up and puffing up of said food product occurs for obtaining hydratable food product being finally dried and hygienic.

10. (original) The method of claim 9 wherein said food product is prepared by at least one of being cleaned, peeled, seeded, shredded, and chopped into pieces during the preparation for drying.

11. (cancelled)

12. (cancelled)

13. (original) The method of claim 9 further comprising preparing said food product to be packed.

14. (original) The method of claim 13 wherein the preparation for packing of said food product involves at least one of breaking, sieving, and selecting.

15. (original) The method of claim 9 wherein said heat treating is performed at a reduced atmospheric pressure.

16. (original) The method of claim 15 wherein said reduced atmospheric pressure is in the range 10-100 mbar.

17. (original) The method of claim 9 further comprising milling said food product into at least one of a food-powder and a granulated form.

18. (original) The method of claim 9 wherein said food product is at least one of fruits and vegetables.

19. (original) The method of claim 18 wherein said fruits are at least one of bananas, pineapples, mangos, papayas, melons, cherries, berries, and strawberries.

20. (original) The method of claim 9 further comprising transporting said food product prior to thawing.

21. (original) The method of claim 9 further comprising coating said food product with a separating agent prior to or after being frozen.

22. (original) The method of claim 9 further comprising dipping said food product into said solution prior to being frozen or while being thawed and predried.

23. (original) The method of claim 9 wherein said solution includes at least one of sugar, salt, coating agents, separating agents, flavor additives, aroma, and food colorants.

24. (withdrawn) An apparatus to produce a food product that is dried, the apparatus comprising:

- a receptacle for receiving said food product for drying in a prepared and frozen state;

- a thawing/predrying unit for thawing and predrying said food product with at least one of a solution having an osmotic pressure higher than water in which the frozen food product is dipped and hot conditioned air;

- a heating means for drying said food product with hot air; and

- a treatment chamber for heat treating in a vacuum said food product so that a cellular break-up and puffing up of said food product occurs without hygienic problems and said food product is dried and hydratable.

25. (withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 24 further comprising a conveyor for transporting said receptacle to at least one of said thawing/predrying zone unit, said heating means, and said treatment chamber.

26. (withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 24 wherein said treatment chamber heat treats by at least one of microwave radiation treatment, infrared treatment, reduced atmospheric pressure treatment, and hot-air treatment.

27. (withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 24 further comprising a separating agent applied to said food product prior to or after being frozen.

28. (withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 24 wherein said solution includes at least one of sugar, salt, coating agents, separating agents, flavor additives, aroma, and food colorants.

29. (withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 25 wherein said treatment chamber provides a hygienic environment conducive to healthy food product preservation.